

**Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group
of the
Expanded Natural Resources Legislative Interim Committee
Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room
160 South 3rd East
Mountain Home, Idaho 83647
November 10, 2004**

Attendees: Chairman: Representative Bert Stevenson
Committee members: Representative Doug Jones, Representative Peter Nielsen,
Senator Tom Gannon
Members of the public: Sign-up sheet available from Legislative Services Offices

Presenters: Clayton Colthorp, Ditchrider, Mountain Home Irrigation District

Chairman Bert Stevenson called to order the meeting of the Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group at 9:40 a.m. on Wednesday, November 10, 2004, in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room. In the first order of business, Representative Jones moved to approve the minutes of October 13, 2004, meeting. Senator Gannon seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Clayton Colthorp, Mountain Home Irrigation District, presented a report on the Polymer Project (PAM). In its second year experimenting with PAM to reduce water loss in the canal, the irrigation district gained 1,404 acre-feet (AF), a good return on its investment of \$900 for materials. This is a cost-share project with the University of Idaho Research Station at Kimberly, Idaho. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) employees assisted with water measurement. The district intends to continue the project whether UI cost-shares in the future or not, but will experiment with different applications. If the experiment continues to be successful, the district may be able to deliver the same amount of water longer over the season. Mr. Colthorp distributed materials to accompany his report.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) The CREP working group is moving forward with the proposal, but many details are still in a state of flux. A more extensive report will be available at the Expanded Natural Resources Interim Committee meeting on November 29th. In this water conservation program, water savings must be verifiable and remain in the aquifer. It is a federal program with federal rules, but the state will have some influence on the rules and will cost-share. In Elmore County, up to an estimated 18,000 acres may be eligible for enrollment. While CREP is not a final solution to aquifer problems in Mountain Home or on the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, it is a delaying tactic while a better solution is identified. Fifteen years gives people time to change their financial affairs and reduce the impact on the economy. Meanwhile, the state must address water issues from Coeur d'Alene to Soda Springs. The city of Mountain Home may be interested in purchasing some of the water rights enrolled in CREP after the program ends.

Mountain Home Working Group Draft Final Report: The committee reviewed its draft working group report section by section, accepting input from those members of the public in attendance. Some of the discussion centered around the role of prior appropriation doctrine, potential changes to domestic water policy, and the need to spread costs of the PAM project equitably among all water

users who benefit. An edited version of the draft will be posted on Idaho Department of Water Resource's (IDWR) website and distributed to members of the Mountain Home Ground Water Advisory Committee prior to their meeting later in the month. The working group directed Helen Harrington, IDWR, to revise the depth and costs related to additional monitoring wells. Ms. Harrington will also contact Phil Rassier, IDWR legal counsel, to discuss supplemental wells in an effort to resolve this issue. Listed below is a summary of the findings, issues and recommendations included in the draft report:

Findings:

- The Mountain Home ground water budget shows an annual deficit of approximately 30,000 acre-feet.
- Some ground water levels have declined as much as 70 feet during the last 35 years while others have not declined significantly.
- Opportunities for recharge or water savings are limited.
- Agricultural and domestic irrigation are responsible for an estimated 95% of ground water pumping.
- Some proposed water uses (domestic or municipal) are presently given preference over other proposed water uses (irrigation).

Issues:

- There are economic impacts to Mountain Home Air Force Base and agriculture.
- The prior appropriation doctrine cannot be compromised or weakened.
- Holders of water rights for all uses of water must be subject to limitations on further water appropriation, and all holders must participate in reductions in use, curtailments, or mitigation.
- Options to address these issues discussed during working group meetings: agricultural set-aside programs; local water projects; low impact landscaping; Bennett Creek water importation; storage increases in Little Camas and Long Tom Reservoirs; determine and decrease reach losses in ditches and canals; increase tunnel capacity; and seal or line canals.

Recommendations:

1. Mountain Home Ground Water Advisory Committee complete and submit to IDWR a recommended management plan within 180 days.
2. Net reduction in ground water withdrawals from the regional aquifer system.
3. IDWR reconsider boundaries of Mountain Home Ground Water Management Area and Cinder Cone Butte Critical Ground Water Area, and redefine the boundaries of areas for ground water management to match physical evidence of declining ground water levels and areas of water supply.
4. Legislation authorizing the creation of an umbrella aquifer management authority with broad authority for inclusion of ground water users, implementing actions to address water shortages, and assessing all water users to finance the actions.

5. The legislature analyze the existing definition of domestic use in *Idaho Code* and the associated exclusion from the requirement to apply for a water right to determine need for revision.
6. Director of IDWR form a water district that includes ground water rights in the Mountain Home area.
7. Establishment of CREP for state of Idaho.
8. Adoption of water conservation measures by local governments, including incentives for low water use landscaping.
9. County and city evaluate benefits of revisions to land codes.
10. One-time budget request to IDWR to install dedicated monitoring wells to provide data for evaluating aquifer conditions and changes.
11. CREP and Little Camas Canal PAM Study projects.

The final report will be adopted at the working group's December meeting and will then be forwarded to the Expanded Natural Resources Interim Committee. Upon receiving reports and recommendations from all the working groups, this interim committee will report its findings to the legislature. If further legislative action such as statutory changes or legislation is recommended, the public will have the opportunity to participate fully in that process.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 6, 2004, at 9:30 a.m. in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room.

There being no further business before the working group, the meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Copies of the maps, studies and handouts are available to the public on the IDWR website at www.idwr.state.id.us/Committee

Meeting notices, agendas and minutes are available to the public at <http://www2.state.id.us/legislat/legislat.html>.

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